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Talas

DER SPIEGEL Interviews Defense Minister Talas

DW111339 Hamburg DER SPIEGEL in German 10 Sep 84 pp 134-144

[Interview with Defense Minister Mustafa Talas by *DER SPIEGEL* correspondents Siegesmund Von Ilsemann and Adel S. Elias in Damascus; date not given]

[Excerpts] *DER SPIEGEL*: Is the political influence of the Army not suffering from the lack of military successes to date?

Talas: Nonsense, that is all rumors. What the press has fabricated about this lately is nauseating. There is just one president in Syria, Hafiz al-Asad. He is the supreme commander of the Armed Forces and secretary general of the Ba'th Party. Write in *DER SPIEGEL* verbatim — there is no military wing nor any party wing in our country.

DER SPIEGEL: What is the story about the president's brother, Rifa't?

Talas: If our president tells somebody to scram to Geneva, then that person goes to Geneva. Anyone who says no to President al-Asad is beheaded. The man whose name you mentioned is persona non grata forever in our country. If this person had not gone abroad, the Army would have struck. Our state is strong. Even Kissinger conceded in his memoirs: "We made every effort to overthrow Hafiz al-Asad in Syria, but the regime is powerful and strong, and we had to abandon our plan."

DER SPIEGEL: According to expert opinion, Israel is very probably in possession of nuclear weapons. What possibilities does Syria have to counteract this danger?

Talas: We are convinced that Israel has nuclear weapons. The Americans have made the Israelis' access to them easy. They are cooperating very closely with Israel in nuclear technology. If Israel uses nuclear weapons, it alone will be responsible. For such an event, the Soviet Union has given us a guarantee that it will let us have nuclear weapons with which we can reply to such a destructive strike.

DER SPIEGEL: What kind of weapons systems are these?

Talas: We can use surface-to-surface or air-to-ground missiles for that purpose. In any case, the Soviets can make available to us the means that will enable us to give a nuclear response. If Israel resorts to nuclear weapons, it will be the sole loser and in no event the winner.

DER SPIEGEL: Who would carry out the retaliation strike — the Syrians or the Russians?

Talas: We, not the Russians, will repulse the Israelis. We would even risk our lives to gain possession of some nuclear weapons with which we could reach Israel. Can you give me a plausible reason why we should not do this in the event Israel uses nuclear weapons first?

DER SPIEGEL: This would then be the prelude to world conflagration.

Talas: As long as the Americans blindly support Israeli policy, there is a fuse for world war.

Talas Denies DER SPIEGEL Report

JN111825 Paris Radio Monte Carlo in Arabic 1805 GMT 11 Sep 84

[Text] *DER SPIEGEL* magazine published a statement attributed to Syrian Defense Minister General Mustafa Talas that Syrian Vice President Rif'at al-Asad is persona non grata in Syria. Of course, this statement raised a hue and cry. So far, the Syrian capital has not commented on this statement. However, Dr Khalil Ahmad, official spokesman for Rif'at al-Asad's information office, affirmed that the Syrian vice president is currently in Geneva for health reasons and that Rif'at al-Asad's treatment has made it necessary to extend his stay abroad for some time. His return to Syria will take place very soon and he will resume his national duties beside President Hafiz al-Asad.

Dr Khalil Ahmad added that in a contact with Dr Rif'at al-Asad, Gen Talas denounced what was said on his behalf in the magazine with respect to Dr al-Asad and expressed surprise that a magazine such as *DER SPIEGEL* had forged facts. Gen Talas added: How can I tell a magazine something which my government and my superiors have not authorized me to say?

Rif'at al-Asad Back in Geneva

NC111448 Paris AFP in English 1443 GMT 11 Sep 84

[Excerpt] Geneva, Sep 11 (AFP) — Rif'at al-Asad, the brother of Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad, has returned here quietly after a brief private visit to Paris, reliable sources said, underscoring rumors he has fallen from favor.

Rif'at al-Asad, once touted as a possible successor to his brother, first arrived in Geneva on June 1 after an official visit to the Soviet Union where he had headed a large Syrian delegation. But he has remained in Switzerland, living in a private villa on the left bank of Lake Geneva. Last month he left for France at the invitation of former Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy but reportedly did not meet with any French officials during his stay.

Sources said he enroled several of his children in French schools and he is said to have a home in the town of Saint Nom La Breteche, outside Paris.

President al-Asad Receives Argentine Official

JN111253 Damascus Domestic Service in Arabic 1115 GMT 11 Sep 84

[Text] Damascus — At 1330 today, President Hafiz al-Asad received Ricardo Daud, the Argentine deputy who is of Syrian origin. Argentine Ambassador in Damascus Andres Ceustermans attended. Daud conveyed to President al-Asad a message from Argentine President Raul Alfonsin dealing with bilateral relations. President al-Asad accepted the message with thanks and asked him to convey a reply message and greetings to the Argentine people and the brother Arab expatriates in Argentina.

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